

Chapter 5

“Why do you think Aslaug didn't want this jelly?” Victoria asked, putting the jar in the refrigerator. She had decided that it needed to be kept cool like any 'normal' jelly. Never mind that Loke had made it appear out of thin air.

“I have no clues.” the stallion replied, sitting down at the breakfast bar. He was looking at his riding helmet, trying to decide if he could modify the straps to make it fit better. “She seemed more like she was irritated by that jar of jelly than anything else.” he commented, still thinking about the helmet.

The tigress brought her mate a cold soda and a bag of potato chips to snack on. “Did Conrad ask you about Heathenism?” she asked, being rather blunt about it. Victoria wasn't sure how to breach the subject with her husband so she just went for broke.

“He did,” her mate answered, looking over at her. “He asked me so I will tell him what I know. I would like to get the filly to help fill in the blanks for me if it would be OK with you.” he added, sipping his soda. He had a serious look on his muzzle by now as he spoke again.

“You know how I feel about religion. I worship the old gods, Sweetheart. I don't believe in modern-day proselytizing on the street corners and the preachers that preach of fire and brimstone in the aisles. This is how I feel; if you like my religion, please join. If you don't, then that's OK too.” The stallion seemed lost in thought for a moment before he spoke again.

“I have *never* pushed Conrad to go to church with you or worship with me. I have always felt it was up to him to decide. That's why we were given sentience; to decide for ourselves.”

The tigress thought about what her husband had said. “I guess you're right. Go ahead and educate Conrad on your religion. We'll let him decide for himself.”

“Thank you.” the berserker said, returning to sipping his soda and munching chips.

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“So ... You're Don Watkins and this is your mother, Sandra Watkins?” Torvald asked, looking at his paperwork. He was sitting across his desk from a pair of spotted skunks, the younger one squirming in his chair. The younger skunk replied, “Yes, Sir.” without looking at the stallion.

"I've had some time to scan this report." the huge fur said, laying it on top of his desk. "I can't believe that you, Mr. Watkins, thought it was OK to spray your homeroom instructor and a full one-third of the class that were unfortunate enough to be in the way! You almost blinded your teacher, Mister! He's still unable to see well enough to drive ..."

"I didn't mean to!" the young skunk said in his defense. He was beginning to look very uncomfortable by now, finding it hard to sit still.

"This isn't the first time you've done this, young fur." Torvald pointed out. Mrs. Watkins looked at the floor in embarrassment, unable to look the stallion in the eyes any longer. "I see that you have a history with musk spraying." he continued, opening the folder once again. "Do you know that the juvenile courts *could* ask for your scent glands to be removed? It wouldn't be the first time that they have made that stipulation. I'm told that mustelids don't do well after that type of surgery." The stallion was giving him the evil eye by now.

"You have to do something!" Mrs. Watkins blurted out. "He can't have that surgery! His father didn't do well after ..." Her voice trailed off as she looked at the stallion, a pleading look on her face.

"I already know about his father." the stallion said, pulling out another folder. "Your son has the same tendencies as your husband ..." Tor got cut off in mid sentence by the femme.

"My *ex-husband!*" Sandra said in a defiant sort of tone. The stallion could see that she was making sure he understood her completely. "I divorced him after he was arrested again last year."

"Ex-husband, then." Torvald corrected himself, trying to get his train of thought back. "Your *Ex* has the same tendencies towards unprovoked violence. Young Mr. Watkins here needs to break out of the pattern he's beginning. I can recommend to the courts that he be put on de-scenting medication." Torvald looked at the young skunk as he continued. "The medication will cause his scent glands to cease production of musk. All that's left is an odorless liquid. He would still have to submit to testing at least twice a month until he proves he's not skipping doses. He would then be tested only once every 3 months until he turns 18."

The berserker shifted his weight in his chair as he looked at Mrs. Watkins. "The testing is embarrassing *and* uncomfortable, too. The lab technicians have to try to express the glands if he cannot." Both of the skunks squirmed in their chairs at that thought. "If he starts skipping

doses, the lab reports will show it. He *will* need to have surgery at that point.” The young skunk's eyes got real wide at the mention of that.

The berserker was rummaging around his desktop for a paper that he had printed out earlier. “He will have to attend counseling sessions, too. This is not cheap, financially speaking. Here are the costs.” the stallion said, giving the femme a paper that broke down the dollar amounts. “It's cheaper than surgery, I can tell you that right now. *That* kind of surgery is not covered by any insurance that I know of.” He added, closing the files on the desk. “I'll leave you two to talk it over for a few minutes.” Tor said as he got up and left the room.

As the stallion was pouring himself a cup of coffee, Ron Orcutt walked into the break room. “You handling the Watkins case?” the otter asked, getting a glass of water.

“Yeah, I have them in my office right now.” the equine replied, sipping his coffee. He looked into his cup as if his coffee wasn't brewed right before he regarded the otter. Tor has worked for this fur for almost 12 years now and He found it a tedious working relationship at best. His supervisor was a very headstrong fur that was quick to judge a case without looking at the facts.

“I heard that the DA is recommending we try him as an adult, Torvald. I think I have to agree on this one.” Mr. Orcutt stated, opening an energy bar and nibbling on it.

“Will you listen to yourself for a minute, Ron. He's only 14 years old! I'm recommending de-scenting meds and counseling.” the stallion said, putting some sugar in his drink. “His mother will still have to pay for his instructor's hospital stay.” Tor added. The stallion was looking at his supervisor, trying to read his body language.

“It's your call, stallion. I can only run it past the DA to see if he'll kick it back down to juvenile division.” Mr. Orcutt stated, washing down the energy bar. “If that's your decision, then I'll try to help you with the DA.”

“Thanks, Ron.” the berserker said, topping off his cup before heading back to his office. He was thankful that the otter had taken his assessment of the matter at face value.

As the stallion walked back into his office, it was apparent that the young skunk had been crying. His eyes were red and his face was wet from tears. “We decided he would go on medication, Sir.” Mrs. Watkins said, wiping her eyes. Torvald took the files and sat them in a basket on the desk. “OK, then. I will give my recommendations over to the court.

We should hear something in a few days, Ma'am." The two skunks got up and left his office quietly.

"I'm doing their work ..." he was thinking, putting his hooves up on the desk and leaning back. He was looking out the window, deep in thought. "I have always been doing their work ..."

###

The Svensen family were doing a Monday Family Evening. Each Monday, they would do something together as a family. This particular evening, they were watching a DVD movie. Conrad was lying on the floor, popcorn bowl handy. Victoria and her husband were sitting on the couch, feet and hooves up on the coffee table. As the movie was going through the teasers at the beginning, Victoria asked her husband a question.

"Torvald, do you think about your old life much?" the tigress asked. She reached out and held his paw as he thought about what she had asked.

"Not much, anymore." he replied, squeezing her paw. "I wanted to be a farmer and grow some grapes. I was just better at being a berserker."

As the huge stallion spoke, Victoria could begin to see his village. The air she was breathing was crisp in her nostrils. It wasn't a large village by any means. She could see crops and grape vines growing nearby. The form of a huge stallion came from out of the fields, dressed in a simple tunic and leggings. He was carrying a bag that was full to overflowing with grapes. Victoria and her present husband were standing off to the side, dressed in their clothes that they were wearing at home.

"Are we really here?" the feline asked, looking around. She reached down with her free paw and plucked a few grass blades, smelling and tasting them.

"Don't let go of my paw," her husband said in a strained voice. She looked over at her mate to see that he was straining to keep them there. "I don't know how long I can keep this up. I've *never* done this before." he added, sweat rolling off of his muzzle. As the stallion from the past walked through the village, Tor and Victoria followed. Soon, an equine femme and her young ones came into view, headed toward the past Torvald. The past Stallion picked up his mate and kissed her and then paid attention to his colt and 2 fillies. The scene began to fade and ripple a little as Tor groaned.

"He cannot hold you here much longer. Torvald is not that strong yet. Here, give me your paws." the femme voice requested. Tor and his mate

felt another set of paws touch theirs and take a grip on their paws. The two turned to see a red fox vixen standing behind them, smiling. The vixen was dressed in a blue robe with a dirk tucked into the waistband.

The vixen looked at Victoria and said, "I am Freya, goddess of love and war. I *can* hold you here. This as you no doubt have figured out is Torvald's world. This is what you would call Northern Germany or as it was called then, Saxony." Now that Freya was holding their paws, Tor had relaxed completely.

"Victoria, Your mate was not born here but this is where your husband lived and fought to his death for what he believed to be right. The *Hedni* had taken this land in conquest from its original inhabitants. It was a very hard life compared to yours with every day being filled with hard work. Your time and place have many conveniences that he did not. His first mate however, was fiercely loyal and loving to him, as you are now." Freya smiled at her before she spoke again. "You love your stallion more than you can possibly realize. I sense that you would pick this life if it was the *only* way to stay with him."

The trio walked around the compound for a while as Tor pointed out to his mate who everyone was that they came across. Eventually, Freya got their attention. "I have something I have to say to you, Victoria. You *must* give Tor all of your love and strength when the time comes. He will need it soon." The vixen looked sad as she finally said, "You must return now." and let go of their paws.

The stallion and the tigress looked around to see that they were back in their home, the movie still yet to start. As they stared at each other, Conrad spoke up. "You want me to make you guys some popcorn?"

###

That night, the tigress was lying in bed and snuggled up to her stallion. "If I hadn't smelled and tasted the grass, I wouldn't have believed that we were there." she commented, still slightly in shock.

Victoria laid there for a while before she spoke again. "What were their names?" she asked, looking up at her mate. "You know, your mate and your children."

"Oh ... uh ... her name was Wilhelmine. We named our son Axel and our daughters were named Dana and Gytha." the berserker replied. His mate could tell that he was lost in thought again. "I remembered that day well. It was a bountiful harvest that we crushed and put up in jugs. In less than ten-day's time I would die in battle against the Germans."

The big equine rolled over onto his side to face his mate. "Sometimes I'm weary from living so stinking long and I wish to be mortal again. I've had to change my name more than a half-dozen times to avoid scrutiny." He swallowed hard as he said "Someday I will have to leave you to avoid attention."

Victoria snuggled up closer to her husband and buried her face into his chest as she said, "I know, Torvald. I know. Please don't remind me." She hoped that her mate couldn't see the tears streaming from her eyes.

"Victoria? What's wrong?" he asked, tipping her head up towards his view. The tigress quit trying to hold it in any longer and began crying in earnest now, her body wracked by heavy sobbing. The huge stallion held his mate tightly as she cried her eyes out for quite some time.

Finally looking up at her mate, she said in a high, wavering voice, "Would our gods be so cruel to force you to leave me? I knew it would happen some day but I don't want it to! Why can't they just let us grow old together?" the tigress began to cry again, burying her face back into her mate's chest. Torvald just held his wife tightly and tried his best to comfort her. That was all he could do right now.

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The next morning, Torvald was standing in his driveway and letting the morning sun warm his body. He rubbed that spot on his muzzle that had been burnt quite badly by one of those accursed hairless canids. He hoped that it would finish healing soon as it was still tender at the moment. He knew *that* particular fur was going to pay dearly when he returned to that realm.

The berserker scanned the morning paper to see that it had no interesting information in it, just the usual stabbings, murders and robberies. He was busy checking the sports page when his stepson joined him.

"Dad, what's wrong with Mom? She's moping around the house and she's barely said a word to me." the young feline said, looking at his stepfather. It was obvious that Conrad was upset by his mother's actions this morning.

"She's upset about my leaving someday." the stallion replied, sitting down on the front steps of his home. He then motioned for the young feline to join him. "I don't want to leave, but some fur would eventually notice that I wasn't growing old. I *haven't* aged a day in over 100 years."

The huge fur was wiping his eyes by now, trying to hold himself together. "I had to leave someone I loved once before and it almost broke my heart then. Leaving your mother *will break* my heart. That I know for sure." Torvald hung his head as he wept softly. "I don't want to leave." he said quietly, hugging his stepson fiercely.

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The stallion and the two tigers were in his car, a 1949 Ford Tudor coupe. They were currently heading to the grocery store a few miles from their home to do their weekly shopping.

The tigress made a comment in general to her husband. "Torvald, why don't you buy yourself a new car? This old thing ..."

The berserker cut her off. "I've owned this car since 1952 when I bought it used from a car lot not far from here. It was a celebration gift to myself for finally getting my Master's degree in Theology."

"Mom! This car's cool!" Conrad said, smiling at his mother. "Dad couldn't get a cooler car if he tried!"

Tor was smiling as he said, "See? At least somebody besides myself appreciates the 'coolness' factor of this old ride." Victoria was finally smiling at the stallion. "Yeah I guess it is different."

"Why do we have to go to this grocery store? There's several that are closer." the young tiger pointed out. Tor looked in the rear-view mirror to see that his stepson was waiting for an answer.

"This grocery store is where I met your step-father." Victoria replied, turning to see her son. "Your biological father left me before you were born. I had help with you from my mother but there were times that I had to do things by myself."

She turned around to see where they were going before she continued. "I was pushing you through the store when you threw your favorite stuffed kali out of your stroller. Tor saw you do that so he brought it back to me. I thought he was handsome but I wasn't sure about anything else. The same thing happened the next week so we exchanged phone numbers. He was kind, thoughtful and polite so I let him take me out. Well, we got married after my divorce from your birth father was final."

"Oh ..." was all that the young tiger said.